

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MONROV 00629 261156Z

ACTION EB-08

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TAGS: EWWT, LI

SUBJECT: MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION TO INQUIRE INTO TANKER
ARGO MERCHANT GROUNDING

1. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN NOTE NO. 140/2-5 OF JANUARY 17 EXPRESSED ITS DEEP AND SINCERE REGRETS OVER THE GROUNDING OF THE TANKER ARGO MERCHANT OFF THE COAST OF NANTUCKET, MASSACHUSETTS ON DECEMBER 15, 1976, AND CONCERN OVER THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT RESULTING THEREFROM. NOTE ENCLOSED TWO PRESS RELEASES, COPIES OF WHICH AND THE NOTE ARE BEING SENT TO DEPARTMENT, ANNOUNCING FORMATION OF MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION TO INQUIRE INTO THIS MARINE CASUALTY. BOARD MEMBERS ARE LAWRENCE E. WALSH, E. WALSH, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND PAST PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION; DR. ROCHEFORTE L. WEEKS, VICE CHAIRMAN AND FORMER LIBERIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; CAPTAIN ARCHIE HORKA, RETIRED MASTER OF S.S. UNITED STATES; CAPTAIN PETER GOVOSTES OF NANTUCKET AND ROBERT TUBMAN, DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE. PURPOSE OF INVESTIGATION IS TO ESTABLISH AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE CAUSE OF CASUALTY AND TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION OF SIMILAR CASUALTIES IN FUTURE AND FOR DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS IF SO INDICATED BY BOARD.

2. PRESS RELEASES STATE THAT THE BOARD WILL COMMENCE FORMAL HEARINGS IN NEW YORK IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH PENDING
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PAGE 02 MONROV 00629 261156Z

COMPLETION OF PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION BY GOL. HEARINGS ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE SOME TWO WEEKS AND WILL BE OPEN TO PUBLIC. USG REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BE MOST WELCOME AS OBSERVERS. ACCORDING TO PRESS RELEASES ARGO MERCHANT WAS FULLY INSURED UNDER TERMS OF 1969 CONVENTION OF CIVIL LIABILITY FOR OIL POLLUTION DAMAGES.

3. PRESS RELEASES STATED THIS BOARD WOULD BE EIGHTH ONE TO BE

CONVENED IN LAST TEN YEARS. IT IS CLAIMED THAT ACTIONS OF THESE BOARDS, COUPLED WITH WORLD WIDE ANNUAL INSPECTION PROGRAM, HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED SAFETY RECORD OF LIBERIAN FLEET. LIBERIA'S RECORD OF TOTAL SHIPS LOST FROM CASUALTIES OVER PAST FIVE YEARS IS CLAIMED TO BE BETTER THAN THAT OF ANY MAJOR MARITIME NATION. GOL IS CONTINUING ITS QTE REGOROUS EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE SUBSTANDARD SHIPS FROM LIBERIAN FLEET UNQTE.

4. COMMENT: WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY ON HARMFUL ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THIS MARINE CASUALTY AND RESULTING INJURY TO REPUTATION OF LIBERIA'S FLAG OF CONVENIENCE WERE PROBABLY CONSIDERED SO DAMAGING THAT GOL WASTED NO TIME IN FORMING MARINE BOARD OF INVESTIGATION. THE OTHER FOUR MARINE CASUALTIES INVOLVING LIBERIAN TANKERS ALONG U.S. TERRITORIAL WATERS, THREE WITH AMERICAN PILOTS WITH TANKERS IN MOTION, WILL PROBABLY BE INVESTIGATED INFORMALLY AND AN INTERNAL REPORT PREPARED.
CARTER

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